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City Document.—No. 113.

CITY OF BOSTON.



LETTER

FROM

GEORGE B. EMERSON TO SAMUEL C. COBB,

RELATIVE TO A SITE FOR A NEW

LUNATIC HOSPITAL.

In Common Council, December 9, 1869.

Laid on the table, and ordered to be printed.

Attest:

W. P. GREGG,
Clerk of the Common Council.

MAY 4 1962

CITY OF BOSTON.

3 PEMBERTON SQUARE, Dec. 7, 1869.

SAMUEL C. COBB, Esq.

DEAR SIR,—I see, from your Minority Report, and from what you have been doing in the City Council, that you are opposed to building a new hospital for the insane at Winthrop. I agree with you; and as I have a very deep interest in the management of the insane, and a citizen's interest in the expenditures of the City Government, I take the liberty of addressing you upon the subject.

I have lived a part of nearly every year for twenty years in Winthrop, not far from the Winthrop Farm, on which it is proposed to build the asylum. I have walked, ridden or driven many times, in almost every month of the year, along the side of the hill, and have walked over it, and am perfectly familiar with everything about it.

The climate of Winthrop during the summer months is very healthy and delightful; but every part of Winthrop is necessarily, from its exposure, very windy. At my house, on ground only thirty feet above the sea level, the winds are always fresh, and in the winter excessively violent. We tried one winter's residence there, and found it almost constantly so boisterous that it was seldom agreeable to take a walk, and the wind often so strong as to make it nearly impossible for a woman to walk at all. On the top of the hill, on the Winthrop Farm, the air is delicious in the hottest days of July and August, and in the

soft weather of early autumn, and the prospects are very beautiful. A person visiting it on such a day might think it a charming situation; but on almost every day in the winter-half of the year, the winds, from whatever quarter, are so furious, that a person who has been once there at that season would not willingly consent to go again till next summer, even for a climb or a look. The top is absolutely unprotected. The northwest wind dashes upon it, coming over several miles of unbroken water and marsh. The north and the northeast winds come upon it over nearly the whole length of Lynn Bay, and the east winds reach it after sweeping over the whole extent of Massachusetts Bay. I never saw a place more unfit to build upon, anything but a lighthouse or a beacon; and if it were built upon, for human habitation, there are few days in the winter when it would be safe for any but a strong man to walk out.

There is scarcely a vestige of a tree there, and it would cost tall fences and high walls and vast trouble and expense to plant trees there.

The site selected for the asylum could be reached only by a long, winding road, which would have to be protected from the winds by lofty walls on each side. Building on that elevated spot would be greatly more expensive than on the plain, as every block of stone, every piece of timber, and the daily supplies for the builders and for the inhabitants of the house when built, would have to be really lifted upwards to a perpendicular height, which would require the expenditure of more force, probably, than would be required to convey these materials from Boston to the foot of the hill.

At the foot and on the lower slopes of the hill, it would doubtless be easy to find water. But it is so excessively steep, on two sides, that it looks as if it would be impossible to get any in any part of the top, and water would have to be pumped up from a distance, at great and perpetual expense.

Fountains, gardens, shrubbery, are all wholly out of the question forever.

No person who had been on the top of that hill in a storm in winter would ever think of building a residence there, and I cannot conceive of a sane person's thinking of it as a suitable site for any building for human habitation, unless he had visited it only in the pleasantest season of the year, and had utterly forgotten the six or seven months during which it must be as bleak, boisterous and inhospitable as Greenland.

I once took Miss Dix, who is as much interested in, and as well acquainted with everything which relates to hospitals and asylums for the insane as any person living, to the top of this hill. We talked the whole matter over then and there, and I know that she entirely agrees with me in everything I have here said.

Earnestly hoping that a more suitable site may be chosen for the contemplated asylum, I am,

Yours respectfully,

GEORGE B. EMERSON.

